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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8306  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004430

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS I2

SUBJECT: DHI QAR PRT FOLLOW ON MEETING WITH JAM OFFICIAL

REF: BAGHDAD 4186

Classified By: Dhi Qar PRT Deputy Team Leader Richard Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Dhi Qar cable.

¶2. (S//REL UK, AUS) Summary: Dhi Qar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Provincial Program Manager (PPM) met on November 6 with a mid-level Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) member, who presented himself as a liaison officer for JAM in Dhi Qar Province, to discuss the willingness of the JAM to cooperate with Coalition Forces (CFs) on reconstruction projects in the Province. This meeting was a follow-on meeting to an initial meeting held on October 26 (reftel). The JAM officer indicated again the willingness on the part of many elements within the JAM in Dhi Qar to cooperate on reconstruction, and gave Dhi Qar PPM some insight into the inner workings of the JAM both in Dhi Qar Province, and in Iraq in general. End summary.

¶3. (S//REL UK, AUS) The profile of the meeting resembled the initial meeting. It was arranged by a local Sheik with whom the PRT is well acquainted. When the PPM arrived, the Sheik reviewed the CF vehicles to see who had come and then telephoned the JAM official, who arrived soon thereafter. (Comment: The Sheik was likely looking for either people who could identify himself or the JAM official such as a local translator, or for anyone whom he suspected belonged to the CF intel community. End comment.) The interlocutors met for about an hour under a tent in a rural area near the city of Nasiriyah. While the JAM official gave no commitment that the JAM would cooperate with the CFs on reconstruction, he indicated again the willingness on the part of many in the JAM in Dhi Qar to cooperate. In addition, he indicated that the present dialogue may open the door to meeting with the provincial commander for the JAM in Dhi Qar.

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Insights into JAM in Dhi Qar  
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¶4. (S//REL UK, AUS) The JAM officer indicated that, while the JAM in Dhi Qar is affiliated with the Office of Muqtada Al-Sadr in Baghdad, the provincial commanders of the JAM have a degree of autonomy in operations. Our conversations with the JAM official, and other sources, indicate that JAM members in Dhi Qar province may have a greater loyalty to their tribe than to Muqtada Al Sadr. Some JAM members in Dhi Qar are therefore willing to cooperate with the Coalition if such cooperation benefits their particular tribe.

¶5. (S//REL UK, AUS) The JAM official believes that Muqtada Al Sadr is moving toward the political mainstream and is seeking to remove criminals from JAM ranks. The JAM official reiterated, however, that control of many elements of the JAM is loose and that it is impossible to assume that Sadr's

orders will be followed by all members.

¶6. (S//REL UK, AUS) What the JAM, or rather JAM members, want from the CFs for their tribes in Dhi Qar are jobs, essential services, and other reconstruction projects such as schools and roads. The JAM official was impressed by the fact that most of these projects use local contractors and local labor sources, thereby bringing much needed jobs and hard currency as well as essential services into the province. The JAM official indicated that the JAM in Dhi Qar is running out of money. He speculated that, were the JAM and the CFs to cooperate more closely on reconstruction, the JAM could serve as a sort of private security firm for the CFs and contractors doing reconstruction. (Comment: No U.S. official present at the meeting gave any indication that such a relationship could be developed, and we are highly suspicious of the motivation behind this proposal. End comment.)

¶7. (S//REL UK, AUS) Comment: Our discussions with this JAM representative lead us to believe the JAM members in Dhi Qar are seeking to maximize financial benefits for their respective tribes. They appear to be calculating that they can cooperate on reconstruction efforts so that the Coalition's resources benefit their communities, even as they maintain a hostile attitude to the Coalition and United States in general, including participating in anti-CF operations in Dhi Qar and elsewhere. This calculation is behind their potential willingness to provide safe passage for Coalition forces within their limited command and control abilities. Reaching an accord with the JAM in Dhi Qar could possibly facilitate better access to sites presently difficult to access for fear of attacks on CF elements and those who cooperate with them. However, while the JAM is a

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major force in Dhi Qar, it is just one of many potential sources of hostilities. Reconstruction efforts could still be hampered by radical Shia elements belonging to the Al Sharkie Group and rogue militias and militia members loosely associate with the OMS. Nevertheless, the suggestion from this JAM representative for a possible "security" understanding between the JAM and CFs in Dhi Qar may represent the beginnings of a mutually beneficial dialogue between the JAM and the Coalition that might mitigate to some degree the present level of threat the JAM represents to CF activities in Dhi Qar. End comment.

Khalilzad